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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON CIVILIAN DISPLACEMENT FROM XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE IN
DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

REF: (A) DURBAN 26; (B) STATE 61855

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SUMMARY:

1. (U) On 20 June, Pol/Econoff visited sites throughout the greater Durban area hosting displaced persons from last month's wave of xenophobic violence to assess the current levels of displacement and identify any immediate humanitarian needs. Hundreds of the original 1750 displaced persons in recent weeks have returned to Durban area townships or their countries of origin, while others remain sheltered in churches because of the threat of violence against foreigners in townships and the cost of renting new homes. The churches hosting the displaced had sufficient food, water and sanitation, but were grappling with longer-term housing. QanninQf the displaced don't return before the end of the month. Utilizing PRM funding (ref b), we have provided clothing and gas cylinders for cooking for the displaced around Durban. End Summary.

MORE THAN HALF OF THE DISPLACED HAVE RETURNED:

2. (U) On 20 June, Pol/Econoff met with the Diakonia Council of Churches, a local faith based organization that coordinated much of Durban's relief response to the wake of the May/June xenophobic violence, and visited churches and police stations that once hosted a combined 1750 displaced persons. Initial estimates of 5,000 displaced (ref a) may have been overstated or indicate that a number of people returned to their home countries or back to their neighborhoods early on in during the crisis. Since the height of the displacement in early June, more than half of the people, primarily male economic migrants from Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania, have returned to their countries of origin or Durban townships. According to the Diakonia Council and several local church pastors, hundreds of male economic migrants were fearful of another wave of xenophobic attacks and took advantage of free transportation to repatriate to their countries of origin. Others chose to stay in the Durban area to reclaim their property and resume employment.

3. (U) Several hundred displaced persons, primarily refugees and economic migrants from Congo-Kinshasa, remain sheltered in Durban area churches because of the threat of renewed xenophobic violence. According to a local church pastor, many of the Congolese are too afraid to return to Durban townships. Last week, a Congolese man was attacked and hospitalized after trying to reclaim his property. A displaced Congolese woman also claimed a mob had threatened to kill her if she attempted to return home. Other displaced persons are deterred from returning to townships because of the cost of renting new property. Many of the displaced persons lost their homes and personal possessions during the violence and lack the income to rent a new home for their families. At all displacement sites visited, almost all of the men were away at their jobs or seeking new employment.

RELIEF SUPPLIES SUFFICIENT; PRM FUNDING UTILIZED:

¶4. (U) Humanitarian commodities such as food, water, and blankets were not immediately needed at the sites visited. The Diakonia Council and local church pastors stated they had received plenty of commodities from local residents and NGOs. Durban's municipal relief agency also provided portable toilets and showers to bolster sanitation facilities. The biggest challenge was finding longer-term shelter for those unwilling to return. Local churches claimed they could not keep their current caseloads for much longer because many of their other programs needed the space and resources currently occupied by the displaced. Many of the churches were trying to work with the municipal relief agency to find other institutions that could provide temporary shelter.

¶5. (U) Utilizing a PRM contribution (ref b) to support the immediate humanitarian assistance for the victims of xenophobic violence in South Africa, the US Consulate General in Durban has provided clothing for displaced Tanzanians who lost their personal possessions during the wave of attacks/threats. The Consulate has also delivered gas cylinders used for cooking to the local Salvation Army sheltering displaced persons.

COMMENT:

¶6. (U) The current Qplacement situation highlights that xenophobic violence remains a perceived threat in Durban that could potentially inhibit some affected populations from returning to their neighborhoods for some time to come. The situation also highlights the strength of Durban's civil society. Local churches and organizations quickly mobilized to provide sufficient food and protection for some 1750 people without much assistance from the local or national government.

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